

WYCOMBE slumped to a new low on Tuesday night when they contrived to go down to managerless Staines Town, who had lost their previous six encounters.

Hopes of Wycombe keeping in the title race are fading fast and they were not helped, in my opinion, by one of the most mystifying selections I can ever remember.

Manager Mike Keen brought in Chris Way for Gary Lester, whose performances this season have made him one of the most talked-about young goalkeepers in the Isthmian League.

Instinct

Time and again Lester has come to Wycombe's rescue this season — indeed he has been one of the side's outstanding players and as he was fit, should have played.

But Mr Keen had other ideas: Before the match, he justified the selection of Way with phrases like "the lad's done well in the reserves," or "we've got to keep Gary on his toes". The manager added: "It's just an instinct

By MICHAEL KNOX **Staines 2, Wycombe 1**

I've got, I'll either be proved right or wrong."

Well, on this performance and in the light of the disappointing result, I would say that Mr Keen got it wrong this time. In my opinion it was unfair on Way to pitch him into this game, which was always going to be a tricky one.

Intervention

It would be quite unfair to blame Way totally for this defeat — there were too many other substandard performances by other Wycombe players on the night — but his uncertainty in the penalty area did little to boost the confidence of the defence.

The Little Wheatsheaf Lane ground is becoming something of a bogey to the Wanderers, who have now lost there three years in a row.

Last week, after a depressing run, Staines sacked their manager Rob Williams after a long series of defeats, but this victory, accomplished with sheer hard work and determination will do much to lift them out of their slump.

What made the result even more disappointing was the fact that Wycombe made a bright start and it took

Staines 20 minutes to launch their first concerted attack, from which they scored.

I'm afraid Way must take a share of the blame. The ball was bobbing about the penalty area when the keeper indicated that he was going to intervene. Unfortunately the intervention never came and this led to a foul by Paul Birdseye just outside the area.

The resulting free-kick was tapped to Alan Gane, whose shot ricocheted off the edge of the defensive wall, sending the goalkeeper the wrong way.

This goal seemed to stir Wanderers into action and two brilliant runs down the left by Tony Price set up marvellous equalising chances.

Strong wind

But Steve Long ballooned the ball over the bar from six yards with an open goal staring him in the face, and then Jimmy Jacobs was adjudged offside when netting the second.

Wycombe's failure to score while on top has been their principal failing over the past fortnight, and the side seemed to be demoralised by these misses.

Staines, playing into a strong swirling wind in the

second half, went straight into the attack and increased their lead in the 52nd minute.

This goal also came from a set piece move. Alan Gane took a free-kick near the right corner flag, and Peter Kemp rose well above the defence to head the ball back to the ginger-haired Dave Jordan who drove it home.

Gary Toll came on to replace Howard Kennedy, who played after seeing a specialist about his leg on Monday, and chances came at both ends.

Terry Glynn saw a neat shot on the turn cleared off the line, but the most effective player on the field was Staines' Jester Williams and only a good save by Way prevented him increasing his side's lead still further.

Long eventually pulled a goal back seven minutes from time with a close range shot, after Price's inswinging corner had been blocked on the line, but it came too late to prevent Wycombe falling to their second consecutive defeat.

Staines: R. Collier; K. Fidler, K. Collins, E. Manners, R. Strong, D. Jordan, A. Gane, A. Rowlands, P. Kemp, S. Read, J. Williams, Sub: J. Rosister (not used).

Wycombe: C. Way; P. Birdseye, G. Borg, R. Davies, S. Hardwick, R. Dell, S. Long, H. Kennedy (sub: G. Toll 65 mins), T. Glynn, J. Jacobs, T. Price.

Referee: E. Day (Walthamstow).
Half-time: 1-0. **Scorers:** Staines — Gane (21 mins), Jordan (62); Wycombe — Long (83).

Price could be going abroad

TONY Price, Wycombe Wanderers' crowd-pleasing winger could be leaving the club in the near future to take a job abroad, possibly in France.

Price, a spectacular goal scorer on his day, is in his second spell with the club and has become a favourite with the fans. But manager Mike Keen revealed this week that the winger could be on his way.

There's bad news too about another key player. Midfield man Howard Kennedy must undergo a minor operation on one of his legs in about a fortnight and could be out of football for at least a month.

Kennedy saw a specialist, who diagnosed the trouble and said that he could keep on playing. That's the reason he played at Staines on Tuesday night. But it was not a great success and he was substituted in the second half.

New face

The uncertainty over Price and Kennedy has added urgency to Mr Keen's efforts to secure two more signings.

"We've got a bit of a prob-

lem and while not concerned, I want to put it right. I think we need to look outside. We need a new face to pick it up again," he said.

What Mr Keen needs most are a tall, proven striker and an experienced midfield player. His interest in Harrow's Peter Sharratt ended abruptly when he heard the asking price of £7,500.

One of the encouraging features of Tuesday night was the fine form of Jimmy Jacobs, who was at the heart of Blues' best moves and in-

deed had a 'goal' disallowed for offside — a decision that Mr Keen described later as "diabolical".

Mick Holifield missed the match with a slight strain but could return for tomorrow's Berger Isthmian League game at home to Walthamstow Avenue.

Goalkeeper Gary Lester, controversially dropped for the Staines encounter, must surely return for Chris Way, while there is a slight question mark over Bobby Dell,

who has gone off the boil lately.

Wycombe will have to be on their best form against a side, who were only just piped for the Isthmian League championship last season. Since then they have lost Dave Crown to Brentford — how well he has done there — while gaining the former Hayes goalkeeper Allan Jarrett.

Last Saturday, they were bundled out of the FA Cup in a shock defeat by Avesley, but they returned to form in mid-week with a convincing victory at Barking.

Barking beat Wycombe last week. Wycombe cannot afford to fritter away scoring chances while in control of a game.

Reserves draw

Wycombe Reserves 3, Chertsey Town Reserves 3

A SLUGGISH Wycombe Reserves side failed to capitalise on their chances in the first half of their Suburban League North Division match against Chertsey Reserves at Loakes Park on Saturday.

Ian Howard put Wycombe ahead in the 10th minute. And although Hunt had a couple of fine chances and Paul West saw a shot come off the cross-bar, they found themselves 2-1 down by the break.

Paul Miles put Blues back on level terms in the 69th minute, but a defensive error allowed Chertsey in to score their third in the 77th minute.

Fortunately for Wycombe, who had Elvis Jack out of the side because he was required by Reading Reserves, Howard converted a penalty after a foul on Clarke two minutes later.

Wycombe: C. Way, T. Lee, K. Mead, I. Rundle, G. Powles, I. Howard, B. Toll, G. Stanmore (sub R. Clarke 74 mins), A. Hunt, P. Miles. Sub K. Stanbridge (not used).